

Speaker Jetton's Opening Address

Inaugural Speech 2007

I would like to take a moment to formally introduce some distinguished guests. First I would like to introduce a veteran of our nation's military that I am honored to have in attendance today, Jason Brown. Also, in attendance is Supreme Court Justice Stith. I would like to extend a special introduction to my wife Cassie, my two daughters Emily and Callie, and my son Will. I would also like to introduce my parents, Bill and Judy Jetton. Finally it is my pleasure to introduce my Father and Mother-in-law, Frank and Marie, and my Sister and Brother-in-law Josh and Lottie.

As I stand before you today at the opening of the 2007 legislative session my mind goes back two years when you first elected me speaker.

What a difference two years makes. What a difference you have made in two years we have changed laws that have made Missouri a much better place to live and raise a family, and I am proud to lead a Missouri House of Representatives that worked together to truly make a real difference for our citizens.

Two years ago we were the last state in America when it came to job creation. We lost 70,000 jobs in one year. Two years ago our budget was more than a billion dollars short and we faced having to cut millions of dollars in spending each year. Two years ago Missouri families were threatened by Meth production that lead the nation. Two years ago our state had a bloated Medicaid system with over one million Missourians and was in danger of bankrupting our state.

Two years ago we had the second worst roads and the third worst bridge system in America. These bad roads jeopardized the life of our families and hurt our economy. And let's not forget education. Just a few short years ago 1/3 of our 4th graders could not read proficiently for their grade level, and our school funding formula was a disaster.

We looked for solutions to tackle these problems and together we accomplished a great deal.

First we fixed our economy and put people back to work. We did this by instituting tort reform, work comp reform, and unemployment comp reform. We created the Quality Jobs Act. We have added over 45,000 jobs in Missouri since January 2005. In August 2005 Missouri had the largest increase in employment nationally.

Next we reduced spending by cutting waste, fraud and abuse and by improving programs. We cut spending on the lottery and sales went up. We cut millions in lease payments on sweetheart deals. We shrunk the state workforce to less than 60,000, and we sought to reform Medicaid that saved us \$138 million that previously went to fraud in the system.

What has been the result of managing our tax dollars better? The best budget in seven years. We ended 2006 with almost \$300 million dollars ahead of projections and had a 9% growth rate in 2006. This growth should give us an additional \$300 million surplus, headed into 2007.

So, what have we done with some of the extra money and savings? We have provided low income energy assistance, given more money to the Meals on Wheels program. We have restored Eye care for Medicaid. We have given a 4% pay raise for state employees. Instituted a 2% increase to higher education funding, and we have increased funding to secondary and elementary education. When we are not facing billion dollar shortfalls it's amazing what happens.

We also take pride in one other fact. We fixed this budget, put people back to work and now have a significant surplus. All without raising taxes.

We also fixed our schools and passed a new funding formula. This new formula adds over \$900 million to schools over 7 years. Every school district in Missouri receives more money under this plan. Last year we passed the largest education budget in our states history, but it also adds accountability to make sure we are getting the biggest

bang for our buck. We also created the Classroom Trust Fund. The good news is that MAP Test scores are up and graduation rates are improving.

Stopping crime and improving public safety was another huge priority for us. We led the charge on stopping Methamphetamine production. We passed Jessica's Law to protect our youngest citizens. We passed stronger DWI laws. We also implemented the right to carry fix. We have reduced Meth incidents by over 40%, our children are now safer from sex offenders and we are getting repeat drunk drivers off our streets.

Also there has not been one instance of a permitted right to carry individual committing any crimes or causing problems. But there have been folks who defended themselves and stopped crimes, which is exactly what we hoped would happen if we passed this law.

Another area that I am very proud of, but can be a bit controversial are the abortion and life issues. We have a strong Pro-Life majority made up of both Democrats and Republicans in the House. We passed several bills aimed at making abortions rare. There is now a 24 hour wait for abortion. There is also a 30-mile radius to conduct abortions. Parental consent is now required for minors to get an abortion. It is also now illegal for minors to cross state lines to get an abortion.

These bills are working. We have gone from several abortion clinics a few years ago to just three today. And for the first time in years Missouri conducted less than 8,000 abortions last year. President Bill Clinton, an abortion supporter, always said his goal was to make abortions rare. Well, in Missouri thanks to your hard work we are doing just that.

I could go on and on listing some of the good things we did over the last two years. Such as stopping Eminent Domain abuse, creating Insurance reform, putting in place an Associated Healthcare Plans, passing the Ethanol standard, Highway reform through the Amendment 3 initiative, providing Emissions reforms, property tax relief for seniors, and creating the link deposit program. On all of these issues we worked together. Believe it or not many received bipartisan votes and passed with huge majorities. In fact Minority Leader Harris and I voted together over 70% of the time, as did myself and Representatives Donnelly, Skaggs, and Zweifel.

We made these changes together but there is still more to do. We can cut taxes on Social Security Benefits. We are one of only fifteen states that still tax these benefits. Our seniors have already paid taxes on this money once. It's not fair to have them pay twice and they need our help.

We need to improve Senior Citizen Nutrition; believe it or not for many seniors getting enough to eat each day is a real problem. The food stamp program is failing some of our poorest seniors. We need to step in and help those who have worked so hard to make Missouri successful.

We need to institute teacher liability protection. Discipline is a major problem for teachers in the classroom. Too many parents don't seem to care about their kid's behavior or education. Many times this negatively affects the learning for the rest of the class. We need laws that will protect teachers from these children and remove them from the classroom so the children who want to learn can. It is sad when two or three kids ruin the education of the other twenty. Let's protect our teachers.

It is time to deal with the St. Louis public schools crisis. For too long these schools have been failing the children of St. Louis. Each time a solution is offered the bureaucrats in charge ask for more time and make excuses for their failures. We can't wait any longer. These children can't wait any longer. Now is the time to act.

It is also time to establish English as the official language of Missouri. English is the one thing that brings all Americans together. Having all our citizens learn English will not only help our newest citizens fit in, but it will make our whole state more competitive with the world. This is the year we should pass this bill.

We need to provide more and better college scholarships. College tuition is growing out of control for many families and we need to help keep our best and brightest right here at home.

Things are better because of us. I am sure none of the bills we passed were exactly like each of us wanted them. However, there were lots of changes debated; some may have went the way you wanted while others didn't. But in the end the results speak for themselves.

Two years ago we were the number one job loss state in America. Now we have more Missourians working.

Two years ago our budget was over a billion dollars short and we faced each year having to cut millions of dollars in spending. Last year revenues were nearly a \$300 million dollar surplus, and we are going into next year with at least a \$300 million dollar surplus.

We've gone from several abortion clinics to just three today, and there will be less abortions performed in Missouri this year than any year since 1975.

Two years ago we were the number one Meth producing state in America. Today Meth incidents are down 40% and our kids have a much better chance of not getting hooked on that life-ending drug.

Two years ago we had the second worst roads and the third worst bridge system in America. Finally we are building roads and repairing bridges thanks to the reforms that have changed MoDOT. This will help our economy prosper, but more importantly our families will be safer.

Let's not forget education. Just a few short years ago 1/3 of our 4th graders could not read proficiently for their grade level, and our school funding formula was a disaster. Today, we have a new formula based on student need and district performance. Finally our kids have a better chance for learning and we are spending millions more in the classroom with added accountability.

All this was accomplished with no new taxes. All the critics said our state budget was in a mess and the only way to fix it was by raising taxes. We've seen several ballot initiatives trying to get voters to raise taxes. They all failed. Voters told us not to raise taxes. They wanted us to make changes and manage the state better. That is just what we did.

With no tax increases we have: more people working, a budget surplus, less crime, better roads and bridges, lower property taxes for seniors, more money for education, increased funding for senior nutrition, and better pay for state workers. There is still more to do, there are obstacles to overcome. Together as Republicans and Democrats we will debate the big issues, argue the merits of bills, and keep fighting to make Missouri the best place in America; to start a business, to raise a family, and to enjoy life.